

CHILDREN LEFT IN CARS AND HEATSTROKE

While the full scope of the fatalities of children due to heatstroke in vehicles is not fully known, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and other safety advocates and academic institutions have recognized the safety threat heatstroke poses for young children left in hot cars. Together, the Federal Government, automakers, car seat manufacturers, health and safety advocates, consumer groups, and others are working together to tackle this important safety issue.

KEY POINTS and STATISTICS

Heatstroke in vehicles is the leading cause of all non-crash related fatalities involving children 14 and younger, according to NHTSA, representing 61 percent of total non-crash fatalities in this age group.

- SafeKids.org estimates that since 1998, more than 520 children have died as a result of heatstroke, with an average of 38 per year, or one nearly every 10 days.
- In 2011 alone, at least 33 children in the United States lost their lives after being left in unattended motor vehicles—and an unknown number of others were moderately to severely injured.
- States with higher incidences of fatalities for children 3 and younger include Texas, Georgia, Indiana, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Virginia, according to San Francisco State University's Department of Geosciences.

Children's bodies overheat easily, and infants and children under 3 years old are at greatest risk for heat-related illness.

- KidsandCars.org shows that 87 percent of children who died from vehicular heatstroke are age 3 and younger.
- A child's body absorbs more heat on a hot day than an adult's does.
- High body temperatures can cause permanent injury or even death.
- Heatstroke begins when the core body temperature reaches about 104° and the thermoregulatory system is overwhelmed. A core temperature of about 107° is lethal.
- Symptoms of heatstroke: Warning signs vary, but may include:
 - red, hot, and moist or dry skin
 - no sweating
 - a strong rapid pulse or a slow weak pulse
 - a throbbing headache
 - dizziness
 - nausea
 - confusion
 - being grouchy or acting strangely

A vehicle heats up quickly, even with a window rolled down.

- A review of child heatstroke cases by NHTSA showed that heatstroke fatalities have even occurred in vehicles parked in shaded areas and when the air temperatures were 80° F or less.
- Heatstroke can occur in temperatures as low as 57 degrees.
- On an 80° day, temperatures inside a vehicle can reach deadly levels in just 10 minutes.

It can happen to anyone.

- According to KidsandCars.org, in more than 54 percent of cases, the person responsible for the child's death unknowingly or accidentally left the child in the vehicle.
- In more than 30 percent of cases, a child got into the vehicle on their own.

You can help prevent unnecessary deaths.

- Never leave an infant or child unattended in a vehicle—even if the windows are partly open, or the engine is running and the air conditioning is on;
- Don't let children play in an unattended vehicle. Teach them a vehicle is not a play area;
- Make a habit of looking in the vehicle - front and back - before locking the door and walking away;
- Take steps to remember not to leave a child in a vehicle:
 - Write yourself a note and place it where you'll see it when you leave the vehicle.
 - Place your purse, briefcase, or something else you're sure to need in the back seat so you'll be sure to see a child left in the vehicle.
 - Keep an object in the car seat, such as a stuffed toy. Once the child is buckled in, place the object where the driver will notice it when he or she leaves the vehicle;
- Always lock vehicle doors and trunks and keep keys out of children's reach. If a child is missing, check the vehicle first, including the trunk.
- Ask your childcare center to call you if your child doesn't arrive on time for childcare.
- If you see a child alone in a hot vehicle, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately. If they are in distress due to heat, get them out as quickly as possible. Cool the child rapidly (not an ice bath but by spraying them with cool water or with a garden hose).

Resources

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration - www.safercar.gov/heatstroke
- San Francisco State University, Department of Geosciences - www.ggweather.com/heat/index.htm
- Safe Kids - www.safekids.org
- Kids and Cars - www.kidsandcars.org
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia - www.chop.edu